

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 42, No. 22 | October 2022

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Location: Virtual/In-Person

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Location: The Darling Hotel

OCTOBER 24 Visalia City Council Candidates Forum

Time: 5 p.m.
Location: 210 Cafe

OCTOBER 27 Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.
Location: Visalia First

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

Coffee & Conversation with Your Chamber CEO-Facebook Live

Time: 8 a.m.

TRAVEL WITH US

NOVEMBER 1-8, 2022 Irish Discovery

DECEMBER 1-5, 2022 Christmas Markets of Montreal & Quebec City

FEBRUARY 21-28, 2023 Ecuador & Galapagos Islands Cruise

MARCH 9-18, 2023 Shades of Ireland: St. Patrick's Day Ireland

APRIL 19-28, 2023 Holland Windmills, Waterways & Tulips River Cruise

MAY 2-10, 2023 Athens & The Greek Islands

MAY 7-22, 2023 Flavors of Portugal & Spain

JUNE 10-21, 2023 Croatia & Its Islands

JULY 19-28, 2023 Iceland: Land of Fire & Ice



Travel provided by:

Collette Vacations
CST #2006766-20

Chamber Explorations
CST #2048841-40

For more information, go to
www.visaliachamber.org/travel

Local nonprofits should apply for COVID recovery funds

Funding for projects and programs that aid in pandemic recovery

The County of Tulare invites local nonprofit organizations to apply for one-time State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) for eligible project activities or programs that help Tulare County residents and the community respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency.

The application period is now open and will remain open for 30 calendar days, closing on October 12, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.

Earlier this year, on July 26, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors allocated approximately \$1 million dollars of its SLFRF for eligible local non-profit organizations that serve the residents of Tulare County. Eligible non-profit organizations must have served the community throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic within the time period of March 4, 2020, to June 15, 2021. In addition, proposals must also fall within one or more of the following general categories: 1) Support Public Health/Address Negative Economic Impacts; 2) Premium Pay for Essential Workers.

County officials have designated the Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency to implement this latest American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding program. For any questions or assistance with the application process, organizations can contact Katarina Serna at (559) 624-8001 or by email at: kserna1@tularecounty.ca.gov. The application form that must be completed can be found at: <https://forms.office.com/g/Tr5qE82Gr>.

For additional information on the American Rescue Plan Act Final Recovery Plan, please visit Tulare County's ARPA webpage at: <https://tularecounty.ca.gov/county/arp-and-bos-newsletter/american-rescue-plan-act-final-recovery-plan-2022/>.



Signed by Gov. Newsom on Sept. 5, AB 257 allows a government-run council to be in charge of fast-food workers' wages, hours and working conditions.

New bill could raise fast-food minimum wages to \$22/hr.



The Sun-Gazette

By Lacey Patrick
Reporter
The Sun-Gazette

Flipping burgers is now giving the economy a run for its money as minimum wage for low-income jobs continues to skyrocket.

With inflation perched on the shoulders of working-class Americans, employees struggle to keep up with the rising costs of living. To supplement this, Newsom signed Assembly Bill (AB) 257 on Sept. 5, which allows a government-run council to be in charge of fast-food workers' wages, hours and working conditions. The council can decide to set the wage as high as \$22 per hour.

"The constraints of what this council may do could have ramifications that hurt local folks," president and CEO of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce Gail Zurek said. "This isn't just about socking it to the large international food corporation, this is going to affect local families and local workers, and frankly, the cost of our local burger too."

The bill will allow a California Fast Food Council that is made up of "representatives from labor and management," according to the office of Gov. Gavin Newsom's most recent press release. The council will be in charge of wages, hours, discrimination policies and working conditions. Fast food chains are defined as restaurants with 100 locations or more in the nation. AB 257 set the capstone for the wage increase to \$22, and the council cannot raise it any higher than that. Whether the council will jump all the way to \$22 right away, or if they will gradually raise it within the next few years is up for their deliberation.

"On the surface, [higher wages] sounds great. Everybody wants everybody to be able to make more money. But ultimately, what that means is higher priced goods, and I think a push towards automation in a way that the industry has been resisting," Zurek said.

Increased minimum wage naturally causes employers to hire

fewer workers, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). To supplement the rising costs of paying employees, businesses switch to non-human workers that don't require a paycheck, like kiosks and self-checkout stations.

According to the CBO, the rise in minimum wage can cause two extreme outcomes. Workers that receive the wage increase will be pocketing more money, while other workers are laid off due to rising employment costs. The nation is already seeing unprecedented unemployment; a rise in minimum wage for food workers in the county could cause an even greater shortage of fast food workers.

"Fast food typically has allowed workers from different types of segments of our population, low skilled workers, or the disabled, who've been able to work in this industry very, very productively," Zurek said.

However, there is some evidence that an increase in the minimum wage can be an overall benefit to the economy. In The American Economic Review, economists David Card and Alan Krueger performed a study on hundreds of fast-food restaurants in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Their research suggests that raising the minimum wage by \$1 doesn't actually mean that employers will get stuck in a rut. Raising the minimum wage actually increased spending, allowing consumers to have more funds to spend, therefore circling back to business-owners pockets. They found that increasing wages gave them enough money to actually hire more people, or to raise the wages of employees already there.

Albeit, a dollar increase in wages is significantly different from a \$15 to \$22 per hour jump. The effects of this jump, if the council did decide to do it, could make it difficult for local franchises to keep up.

CITY UPDATE

SB-1383 and the City of Visalia

Businesses of all sizes play an important role in California's climate food fight, as disposing of food and organics waste into the trash heats our climate. Instead, disposing of these materials into the City's green bins allows those recyclable and organics to be turned into green products.

In fact, State Senate Bill (SB) 1383 requires all California businesses, multi-family properties, and residents to divert recyclable and organic materials from landfill. As of January 1, 2022, it is illegal to place recyclables or organics in trash containers in California.

What do these regulations mean for Visalia businesses? While having access to recycling and organics waste collection service and sorting waste appropriately have been required for several years in Visalia, SB-1383 requires changes to the way that businesses manage their waste streams.

1. Recycling and Organic Collections: Businesses will be required to either have recycling and organic waste collection service. The City already offers recycling and organic can ser-



vices as part of residential trash collection services.

2. Sort Recyclables and Organic Waste: Recyclable and organics must be disposed of in their required receptacles or containers.

3. Contamination Monitoring: The City is required to annually monitor all collection routes for contamination to ensure wastes are being sorted properly. You may see City staff looking inside your trash, recycling, and/or organics bins. If wastes are not sorted correctly, a contamination warning tag may be left on the bin with information on sorting wastes appropriately. Subsequent contamination of waste streams may be issued fines.

Compliance assistance is available through the City of Visalia's Solid Waste Division. Together, we can manage waste streams, decrease methane gas emissions, and meet the requirements of SB-1383.

For more information on SB-1383 requirements, contact the Public Works Customer Service Line at (559) 713-4428 or visit www.visalia.city/sb1383.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Have we lost our collective minds?



Gail Zurek
President and CEO
Visalia Chamber

It's election season, and it seems as if everyone has a comment about everything. Ads are all over, telling us in quick soundbites how to make crucial decisions. These sound bites are repeated as I bump into people around town and have conversations. It seems as if many have lost the art of conversation, thoughtful discourse, and an understanding that decisions aren't made in a vacuum. Solutions to significant community challenges aren't boiled down to a catchphrase or a political sound bite.

Once, as neighbors, we can just talk about our shared common goals, we are not as divided as the latest political ad would have one believe. The conversations change when we agree on the common shared goal, even if we see different paths to achieve that goal. We start from a place of unity rather than trying to win an argument.

Recently I was in a room full of late 20s and early 30s-year-old professionals. When September 11th came up in conversation, it occurred to me that most of the young professionals had a very different perspective than mine. Most were small children in 2001. Their memory of that day and the following events were born from history

books or watching the old news coverage. September 11th was horrific, and anyone who watches the footage from that day knows the devastation, loss, and heartbreak.

What the cameras don't capture as clearly is September 12th. On September 12th, we all came together. We realized our differences are not as significant as what ties us together. We were concerned for our neighbors because they were our neighbors, not because they had the same political ideology as us. We reached out to make sure folks were okay and asked if they needed something, not because they thought the way we did but because they were our neighbors. That painful day reminded us that we are all in this together.

On the eve of this election, where it seems issues have become increasingly divisive, I wish we could return to the September 12th mentality. I firmly believe that we have far more in common than different. What we want for our families and our neighbors is very similar. I wish we'd have the opportunity to see beyond the soundbites and the differences, to see what unifies us.

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce with the Sun-Gazette will host Candidate Forums on October 4th and 24th. This forum facilitates our community's thoughtful discourse about how we can be better together. These candidates have stepped forward willing to serve the public. Now is our time to engage in understanding their path to get us to our common shared goal. More information about the forums can be found at visaliachamber.org.

BOARD SPOTLIGHT



TOSHA PEQUENO
Name: Tosha Pequeno
Company: Valley Strong Credit Union
Title: Senior Branch Manager

Why do you serve on the Chamber Board of Directors?

I serve on the Chamber Board of Directors because I want to give back to the community that has welcomed me so warmly. I see what the Chamber does in the community, and I want to be part of it! Being new to Visalia (two years now) I know serving on the board will be a great way to learn more about our town, its history, and be a productive and proactive member of our community.

What has the chamber done in the last 12 months that has helped your business?

The Chamber has gone above and beyond for Valley Strong Credit Union. We were the new kids in town, and the Chamber welcomed us with open arms. The connections and visibility that the Chamber has given us, has absolutely been a huge contributor of our success in Visalia.

What's your favorite family tradition?

Unfortunately, we do not do this anymore. But for years and years, my family dry camped in the desert for a week at Thanksgiving and New Year's. Bonfires, laughing, riding quads, music... It was the best!

Do you have a "motto"?

"Go Big or Go Home!" I live that motto daily.

What motivates you to work hard?

My daughter. I want to demonstrate that hard work and determination is necessary to succeed in life and to feel confident about yourself.

Is your glass half full or half empty?

My cup runneth over!

How do you support #Loyal-to-Local?

Our credit union provides a "Team Member Appreciation Lunch" every other week. We always make sure we order from a local restaurant. Also, when we moved into Tulare County, it was important to us that we gave our business to local companies. Therefore, we utilize a local vendor for pest control, janitorial, photography, etc.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Editor Gail Zurek
Layout The Sun-Gazette

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 Visit www.visaliachamber.org

Community Loyal Members | *A thriving community starts here!*

NEW

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce would like to welcome our newest members. We encourage individuals and businesses to support chamber member businesses.

Business Builder Members:

- The Good Life Photography

Business Connector Members:

- SA Recycling
- Tulare County Federal Credit Union

Small Business Members:

- Action Equipment Rentals & Sales
- Adobe
- Bowlero
- Bubble Zone Car Wash
- Mountain Mike's Pizza
- Stacked Bar & Grill

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Central Mother Lode Regional Consortium
- San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization
- Stand Up for Victims
- University of Massachusetts Global*
- Visalia U.S. Army Recruiting Center

Micro-Enterprise Members:

- Sno Shack Central Valley

RENEWING

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce thanks the following companies for renewing their commitment to the community of Visalia.

Keystone Members:

- Visalia Mall*

Community Investor Members:

- Bulldog Sports Properties*

Business Builder Members:

- Central Valley Collision Repair
- County of Tulare Board of Supervisors
- Hydrite Chemical Co.*

Business Connector Members:

- Armstrong Community Management
- Don Celillo Electric Company*
- TechCare360 Inc.
- Valley Oak Credit Union

Small Business Members:

- BJ Perch Construction Inc.*
- Children's Choice Dental Care*
- Courtyard Aesthetics



- Equity Group, Inc.*
- Lucky Day Laundry Wash and Fold Services
- Megan Ide, DDS & Shirley Lei, DDS*
- Partyworks, Inc. dba Party City
- Pools Plus*
- San Joaquin Valley Homes*

Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- Enchanted Playhouse Theatre Company*
- Pipeline Church Visalia*
- Saint Anthony's Retreat and Conference Center*
- Tulare-Kings Dental Society

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Family Builders Foster Care, Inc.*
- Rancho Robles*
- Visalia Fire Assoc. Local 3719
- Visalia Lions Band Review

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

Engel-Silva takes over CEO role for Proteus



Danielle Gutierrez
 Reporter
 The Sun-Gazette



For the first time in over 50 years of operation, Proteus, Inc. announced its first female chief executive officer to direct the company in its goal to provide a better life for farmworkers.

Michelle Engel-Silva, who has a doctorate in educational leadership, was announced as the official CEO on Sept. 9 at the company's 55th Anniversary Gala, where the nonprofit organization celebrated a 55-year legacy of serving farmworker populations. After starting her career with Proteus 27 years ago, Engel-Silva said through making herself visible, volunteering for extra work and seizing opportunities as they came, she is honored to have been chosen as the company's CEO.

"It's just an honor to just lead the company, female or not. It's kind of fun [because] I have two daughters, so I feel good about them seeing a woman that has come to this position," Engel-Silva said. "I'm glad I'm a role model for them. And then all the other women just reaching out [to me] have kind of made me feel honored that I'm in this position to represent."

Proteus, Inc. serves agricultural workers and families experiencing lower socioeconomic, or social, status and a need for additional resources. Their work has helped farmworkers and other low-income residents throughout Fresno, King, Kern and Tulare counties since 1967. More specifically they offer programs for adult basic and vocational education, job training, employment-related services, family self-sufficiency, energy programs and other human service programs directed to helping people and families who need it.

This isn't her first time taking the reins as CEO. Prior to her acceptance for this position, she once served as the Interim CEO for Proteus in October 2021. She was named the interim after the departure of former CEO Robert Alcazar, who left for personal reasons. Engel-Silva aspires to serve as long as her leadership is needed for Proteus.

"As long as I'm doing good things for Proteus

and it makes sense to have me here, and I can guide and get us to where we need to be, I'm in it to do that," Engel-Silva said.

Before serving as the CEO of Proteus, Engel-Silva began her climb up the corporate ladder in 2005 and landed herself the position chief of corporate relations and human resources officer. With that position, Engel-Silva said that is when she became a type of executive manager, and was given the opportunity to have more one-on-one meetings with the CEO of the time, Mike McCann. She said she began to attend executive team meetings where she and other executives would meet to make decisions for the company.

"That was kind of the start of higher level opportunities here at Proteus, for sure," Engel-Silva said.

In 2016, Proteus promoted Engel-Silva to director of operations, which had her overseeing grants to ensure the organization was meeting grant requirements and being responsible with grant budgeting. She said she oversaw 12 divisional and departmental directors and began her executive journey for Proteus by working on a lot of strategic planning for the company.

Prior to her corporate positions, Engel-Silva started her career with Proteus 27 years ago. She first joined the organization in 1995 as a vocational instructor, where she taught classes based on certain job skills that could apply to truck driving or weatherization. She worked her way up to serve as the program manager, where she would oversee the company's welfare-to-work program,

and then became an organizational development specialist, structuring things like company finance and operations to make them more efficient.

"It's been a really great learning process for me, and I feel like I've really built up my skills," Engel-Silva said. "[When] I walked into the door 27 years ago, I never would have dreamed that I would be the CEO, or the first female CEO, of Proteus."

Engel-Silva received her doctorate for educational leadership from the University of California, Davis, where she submitted her dissertation: "The Role of Distributed Leadership in High Quality Educational Organizations."

She's also holds a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from California State University, Bakersfield and a bachelor's degree in communications and international relations from Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Ore.

RIBBON CUTTINGS



Nothing Bundt Cakes hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of the company's 25th Birthday. They are located at 2040 S. Mooney Blvd. and can be reached at (559) 931-9799.



East to West Barber Academy celebrated their grand opening with a ribbon cutting. The academy is located at 320 S. Bridge St. Call (559) 429-4287 to schedule an appointment.



Bubble Zone Car Wash hosted a ribbon cutting in preparation for their grand opening on Sept. 23. Visit them at 318 W. Shannon Pkwy. They can be reached at (559) 623-1765.

COWBOY CHRISTMAS

RIDING INTO TOWN
DECEMBER 2, 2022

visaliachamber.org/christmas



VALHALLA RESTAURANT & GIFT SHOP

Congratulations to **Valhalla Restaurant & Gift Shop** who celebrated 40 years in business in August! They celebrated by demonstrating how aebleskivers are made with free samples.

California Service Dog Academy hosted a graduation for their 2022 class, in celebration of the hard work of their team, volunteers, donors, and fosters.

Sunset Magazine announced its 2022 Travel Award winners and **City of Visalia's** Sequoia Shuttle was named Best Transit and **Sequoia Riverlands Trust** was recognized under Amazing Out-



door Activities.

Tuocomas Federal Credit Union opened their newest branch in the Save Mart at Mary's Vineyard shopping center. The branch is open Monday-Friday 9am-5pm and Saturday's 9am-2pm.

Leadership Visalia welcomed its 2022-2023 cohort in September with a program kickoff at orientation and retreat. The class was introduced to the program's key overview,



LEADERSHIP VISALIA

ice-breakers, and discussed project ideas.

Congratulations to **4Creeks, Inc.** who celebrated 14 years in June! They announced in August their expan-

sion to Colorado.

Jon Stemkoski's Celebrant Singers returned home from outreach in Poland and Ukraine. They will host a virtual live-stream event-Celebrant Singers Virtual Homecoming Celebration & Special Report on Oct. 15. More information can be found at celebrants.org/homecoming.

Visalia First hosted Serve Day in September, with hundreds of volunteers extending help and hope to multiple organizations and agencies throughout Visalia and surrounding cities.



WYNDHAM VISALIA



VISALIA FIRST

Wyndham Visalia celebrated House Keeping Appreciation week in September by recognizing their employee Esther Espinoza with their Annual Housekeeping Hero Award for being a team leader and dedicated worker for over 29 years.

Visalia sees 3rd Mountain Mike's Pizza



Danielle Gutierrez
Reporter
The Sun-Gazette

Trips to Mountain Mike's Pizza just got a whole lot easier with the recent opening of a third pizzeria in Visalia, taking over where the former Ryan's Place Restaurant used to be.

This third installment of Mountain Mike's Pizza has officially opened for business as of July 13. Known for their 20-inch "mountain-sized" pizzas, the pizzeria is ready to serve up some "Pizza the Way it Oughta Be!"

"Our new Visalia restaurant is on a bustling street, and we are excited to welcome locals familiar with Mountain Mike's and new guests who we know will embrace the quality and family-friendly atmosphere Mountain Mike's is known for throughout California, and beyond," co-owner Harry Singh said via a press release.

Mountain Mike's Pizza is a California-based, family-style pizza that's been in operation for over 40 years. The location is owned and run by multi-unit owners Singh and Inderjeet Kaur Dhillon, Visalia locals and husband and wife duo. They also own and operate two other Mountain Mike locations, which are the Visalia restaurant on west Walnut Avenue and the Tulare restaurant on east Propriety Avenue.

Singh said, in a press release, after the success of the restaurant's location on Walnut Ave, he and his wife are proud to open a second location on Mooney Boulevard. He said after a six-year search for a second location, they were able to land the spot on one of Visalia's busiest streets last year. The achievement was highlighted by his observations of passion coming from the local community regarding the brand.

This pizzeria is located at 3103 S. Mooney Blvd. in the Towne and Country III Shopping Center and is open daily from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. It is the first restaurant to take residence at the location since the former restaurant, Ryan's Place Restaurant, closed in 2020 due to the financial strain of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown.

According to a press release, the newest installment of Mountain Mike's Pizza features the brand's stamp of a welcoming, family-friendly atmosphere with 4,100 square feet of space for residents to stretch out while enjoying their pizza. Sports fans can take advantage of the pizzeria's 10 large-screen televisions with every approaching game day and party planners can utilize the restaurant's private party room that accommodates up to 55 guests at a time. The newly installed location also has an all-you-can-eat pizza lunch buffet and an arcade area for kids of all ages, making it a place with a variety of activities for customers to enjoy.

Mountain Mike's crafts delicious hand-made pizzas with fresh ingredients. From its well known crispy, curly pepperoni, 100% whole milk mozzarella cheese and fan-favorite specialty pizzas, the restaurant has something for everyone. Whether it be dine-in, carryout or delivery, customers can always expect Mountain Mike's to supply a quality pizza focused on freshness, flavor and value.

Aside from the restaurant's own delivery service, orders for the pizzeria can also be placed through any of the brand's third-party delivery partners like DoorDash, GrubHub and UberEats.

Mountain Mike's Pizza has been a leading California-based, family-style pizza chain since 1978, when it was first established in Palo Alto, California, according to the restaurant's website. With 44 years of service, Mountain Mike's has more than 250 locations across California, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and Idaho.



Locals can take a hike to the newest Mountain Mike's pizzeria on Mooney Boulevard. **RIGOBERTO MORAN**



How can my employees get more involved with the Chamber?

Not just the individual that signs up for a membership, but your entire team is a member of the Visalia Chamber! Have your team sign up for Chamber updates and contact me directly on ways to get involved.

How do I get more membership benefits?

For additional benefits, please reach out to Charlie Saponara (charlie@visaliachamber.org) for membership upgrade opportunities!

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send me a message:
Jena@visaliachamber.org

Visalia Unified School District Board establishes the foundation for the best year ever



The 2022-23 school year has begun, and Visalia Unified is on a path to having the best year ever. This is in large part due to the guidance of the Board of Education. Since June of 2022, the Board has collaborated with new Superintendent, Kirk Shrum, in establishing a strong foundation and conditions for both students and staff to be successful.

These developments are driven by input gathered through the community survey for the nationwide superintendent search led by the Tulare County Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Tim Hire. In that survey, the community highlighted six focus areas. In addition, Visalia Unified is the 32nd largest district in the state; however, the systems and structures mirrored that of a much smaller district.

The Board has taken the following steps to position the District to nurture conditions for students and staff to be successful:

ACADEMICS

- Adopting a three-year math requirement, giving stronger postsecondary value to our high school diploma.
- 24/7 tutoring for students in grades 4-12 via Paper.
- Development of the Learning and Leadership Division to have a focus on student achievement.
- Development of the One

Visalia Connected initiative to create a framework to have 100% of students engaged in at least one meaningful engagement.

STUDENT AND STAFF SAFETY

- Raptor Technologies Visitor Management and Emergency Management platform to conduct instant background checks of all visitors and communicate any emergencies to staff and families.
- Transfinder fully integrates with VUSD's student information system and provides Transportation staff with routing, turn-by-turn guidance, and a robust parent communication tool. If a bus is late, or a parent would like to know if their student is on a bus, Transfinder will allow parents to access this information.
- Development of Safety and Student Conduct positions to focus on student and staff safety.
- Development of a K-12

counseling structure to ensure students are accessing academic and social-emotional counseling services.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Development of a Communications Department to adequately provide relevant and accurate information to all stakeholders.

EDUCATION OPTIONS AND PROGRAMS

- Development of District Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) and Athletic positions to enhance the current programs.

DISTRICT CULTURE

- Intentionally focused support for new employees through workplace visits and training.

DISTRICT MISSION, VISION, AND GOALS

- Development of District Core Beliefs and Commitments to serve as a lens through which we operate and make strategic decisions

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VISALIA CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES FORUM

MONDAY, OCTOBER 24TH
210 CAFE- 210 W CENTER AVE.
5:00PM MEET THE CANDIDATES
5:30 PM FORUM BEGINS

PLEASE RESERVE YOUR FREE SEAT: [VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/FORUM](https://visaliachamber.org/forum)

JOIN US

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

October 20, 2022
4:30pm - 6:30pm

**RSVP required; limited spacing*

HOSTED BY

THE DARLING HOTEL

RSVP: visaliachamber.org/bah

CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE PROFILES

Ordered by district, then alphabetically



Justin Bolton

District 1
Facebook: Justin Bolton
Email: jbolton4d1@gmail.com

I have done a little bit of everything. Eagle Scout, Mechanic, Lifeguard, Emt, Firefighter, entrepreneur.

What is the biggest issue facing District 1?: After walking door to door, the majority of people complained about the homeless.



David S. Farris

District 1
Web site: Farris4CityCouncil.com
Email: campaign@davidsfarris.com
Phone: 559-429-8792

Mailing address:
 2502 W. Main Street
 Visalia, CA 93291

David currently works as a Senior Controls Engineer for a local business and has lived in Visalia with his wife, Lauren (a 6th generation Visalian) for 12 years. They share two children - Evelyn, 9; Austin, 7; and a Vizsla named Ginny, who thinks she is one of the children.

What is the biggest issue facing District 1?: We need to secure our water infrastructure now and for the foreseeable future, utilizing and expanding tools such as regeneration basins, injection wells & increasing capacity of water reprocessing. Together we will leverage these tools to increase our control & influence over our water infrastructure creating a sustainable water plan for future generations of Visalians. This is the most important task before us to ensure that the central valley agriculture industries can thrive once more.

What is the City's role in recruiting, keeping, and supporting business?: Providing a safe and predictable atmosphere which entrepreneurs can rely on with economic incentives such as startup tax breaks and easy to navigate permitting and licensing processes to reduce bureaucratic burdens. Furthermore, through civil planning and design, the city can facilitate and increase foot-traffic in key business districts by expanding usable outdoor space for businesses and their patrons to utilize. Our downtown can and should be as vibrant as the boardwalks of our costal neighbors.



Liz Wynn

District 1
Web site: wynn4visalia.com
Facebook/Instagram: wynn4visalia
Email: wynn4visalia@gmail.com
Phone: (559) 623-2348

Mailing address:
 P O Box 4106
 Visalia, CA 93278-4106

I have a long history of community service. I have the experience and the planning background to evaluate the issues facing Visalia. I love this City and will listen to my constituents carefully. I will work hard and devote the time that it takes to be an effective councilmember.

What is the biggest issue facing District 1?: Mitigating the homeless crisis has always been very important to the residents in District 1. Thanks to the City's HOPE team, hundreds of homeless people in Visalia have received counseling, mental health treatment and job training. There is much more to do and it won't be a quick or easy solution. I will keep an open mind to solutions to this challenging issue not only in our community but our State and nation.

What is the City's role in recruiting, keeping, and supporting business?: The City's role is to support business by maintaining an inventory of appropriately zoned land for new opportunities. Development fees and processing time need to be competitive with other communities in the state. Retaining and supporting business by maintaining infrastructure, supporting business-friendly legislation and ensuring an adequate variety of housing is essential to maintaining a strong workforce



Heather Carter

District 3
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I was born in a small rural town in Ohio, and I graduated from Kent State University with a BA in International Relations. After moving a round I have settle in the valley with my family. I have been a personal trainer and fitness instructor for over 10 years.

What is the biggest issue facing District 3?: The availability of preventative and specialized health care that can be found in the valley. Hopefully in working with Kaweah, Visalians can access all options of health care without traveling as far as Los Angeles or San Francisco.

What is the City's role in recruiting, keeping, and supporting business?: First, we must have a young workforce that attracts businesses in coming to Visalia, staying, and investing in our community. To keep the workforce young, we need to invest in our downtown and our parks and recreation. Another very important factor is education to keep a young workforce we need to provide top notch education k through 12 and support COS in higher education. Also, making health care a priority will attract small businesses to the downtown, which will in turn keep our workforce here in Visalia.



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I was born and raised in Visalia. I graduated high school from Mt. Whitney and earned a bachelor's degree from San Diego State University. Once I returned home, I began working for Cal-Tex Transportation as a Logistics Manager, where I still work today. I am married with two children.

What is the biggest issue facing District 3?: The biggest issue facing my district is the poor roads and traffic circulation. The improvement of the intersection at Akers and Goshen was a project residents had many concerns about and I am happy to report that the project was approved and the intersection was repaired in my first year. The council has approved projects to improve traffic circulation such as widening Shirk and Akers, and are currently looking at widening Visalia Parkway.

What is the City's role in recruiting, keeping, and supporting business?: I know that the private sector thrives when the public sector stays out of it. The city's role in recruiting and supporting local business is to make sure that city has a well maintained infrastructure and a clean safe environment for businesses to thrive. When problems arise, the city should streamline practical solutions. The city should not be creating unnecessary obstacles for business owners as they have enough obstacles to overcome from the state.



Bob Ainley

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I was born and raised in Visalia. I am co-owner of The Darling Hotel and a business attorney. As a local small business owner and father, I want our city to be safe for our children and supportive of the small businesses that provide opportunities and prosperity to our community.

What is the biggest issue facing District 4?: For District 4 in particular, I think the biggest issue is public safety (including the homelessness issue), which has a dampening effect on local investment and quality of life.

What is the City's role in recruiting, keeping, and supporting business?: The City is the caretaker of the local economy and should not add unnecessary burdens to local businesses—California is hard enough! When the City eases the burden of government on new and existing businesses, it creates an attractive environment for new businesses forming or relocating and helps keep existing businesses stable and, hopefully, able to grow. The City is also a key partner in facilitating programs and initiatives that strengthen workforce retention and competitiveness.



Marie Line-Labbee

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I'm the 4th generation born and raised in Visalia, and I'm raising the 5th. After graduating from Golden West, I graduated from Chapman University with a degree in Organizational Leadership. I'm a mom, small business owner and have served on many non-profit boards as well as volunteered in our community.

What is the biggest issue facing District 4?: This district has many diverse issues. I've heard your concerns. Around the oval the concern is safe neighborhoods and basic necessities. Shannon Ranch is concerned with the navigation center, car break-ins and the expansion on Riggan. In Beverly Glenn I've heard concerns about speeding, dying oak trees and development.

What is the City's role in recruiting, keeping, and supporting business?: As a city, we are responsible for creating a community that can accommodate business growth. That includes working with businesses to secure licenses and permits in a timely manner and having clear and reasonable guidelines for building proposals. We also need to accommodate the families the businesses bring to our community; with diverse neighborhoods, beautiful parks, and family friendly activities. It's also important to connect them with the Chamber and Downtown Association as well.



Emmanuel Soto

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Emmanuel Soto graduated from COS and UC San Diego and now a proud homeowner in the historic district of Visalia. Emmanuel is dedicated to uplifting his community, working for Self-Help Enterprises, serving as a Community Development Specialist. He holds values of service above self, advocacy, and action in our community.

What is the biggest issue facing District 4?: Homelessness, that community needs services like the Navigation Center being built in Visalia and Salt+Light project in Goshen, in order to have a chance to deal with their trauma and have a fighting chance. What we have been doing is not working. Providing different avenues for that community allows for more success overall. The low barrier shelter will help our community, our first responders, and the unsheltered community, it is great news for Visalia.

What is the City's role in recruiting, keeping, and supporting business?: Our city is supportive of our businesses, and I support streamlining the process for new business ventures by increasing the economic development department. I support our need to provide resources via our chambers, SBA and SBDC that will help businesses. We are centrally located with the workforce to bring in large distributors via tax incentives, but we need to incentivize our small businesses because they bring culture, connect the community, and help Visalia thrive.



Kris Korsgaden

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Tile contractor; third generation Visalian.

What is the biggest issue facing District 5?: Housing.



Steve Nelsen

District 5
 I am a long-time Visalia resident with a long history of community involvement and leadership. With extensive work in community engagement, non-profit organizations and Local government. I am driven by the desire to inspire and affect change for the greater good. Graduate of Cal State University Fullerton.

What is the biggest issue facing District 5?: I believe the challenges in my district are not any different from those across the city, county and state. We have inflationary issues that adversely affect our ability to achieve objectives. How best do we resolve the homeless issue? How best do we fund road improvements? Is our law enforcement and fire department funded sufficiently to address emergencies throughout the city? The list goes on but resolving my district's issues requires the cooperation of all council members and likewise I need to be sensitive to issues in other districts and by working together we can create a solution path.

What is the City's role in recruiting, keeping, and supporting business?: As it relates to the city supporting business, I think our recent history is a solid foundation of cooperation and achievement. We have not raised taxes. City government has been cognizant of inflationary challenges and the pandemic thereby not creating overbearing regulations that minimize flexibility and increases the cost of doing business. We are constantly working internally to streamline our decision-making processes that enable business to commence operations or remain profitable as dynamics alter the business climate. I'm not saying everything is perfect but the first step in reaching the desired goal is listening and being aware of unnecessary impediments for business large or small.

VISALIA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD CANDIDATE PROFILES

Ordered by district, then alphabetically



Walta Gamoian

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After 34 wonderful years in the classroom, I pursued my dream of being on the school board. I eagerly examined the policies and moved the direction of the district to improve academic standards, college and career readiness, and student conduct policies.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: Our children are not on grade level for reading and math. Since I have been on the board, that has been one of my biggest priorities. The systems over the past years have been broken. VUSD needed change. With this Board, I hired a new superintendent. We have the leadership in place to implement the changes necessary so our kids can perform at grade level and reach their highest potential.

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: I have the goal of 100% of our seniors will be college (UC/CSU) or career ready. The following has been implemented: The California College Guidance Initiative (starts the UC/CSU track at 6th grade), El-Rise (language acquisition for English learners), A-G (UC/CSU) Completion Grant, UC Merced Advising Corp (a counselor dedicated to each high school for UC/CSU admission) and a three-year math requirement (so students meet a minimum math requirement to a CSU).



Jesse Perez

Board Trustee Area 1
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Served in the United States Marine Corps from 2004-2008. Graduated from Bible College with a Pastoral Theology Degree. Took a position as Principal at Coastline Christian Academy from 2012-2015. Married to my wife Janet for 18yrs. We have four daughters together. We are local small business owners in Visalia.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: My greatest concern is the push of political ideology upon our students. We must refocus on education and not the indoctrination of our children. Instead of learning the values of grit, hard work, merit and truth, they are encouraged to find victimhood, systems of oppression, shallow thinking, and nothing matters but personal narratives. Schools should be a place where parents know their children will be educated in core subjects and not world or political views.

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: Establish that VUSD has information and accountability systems that value and incentivize college and career readiness. Meaning ensure ALL stakeholders have the information they need to support college and career readiness. Accountability systems should reflect the goal of college and career readiness for all students. As a school district we must provide the district the tools they need to establish progress targets that communicate a clear path for students, schools, and parents to follow.



Paul Belt

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I grew up in the Coalinga, College CSU Chico '78, Husband (44 years) Father (4 sons all Graduates of Golden West HS) Grandfather (2) Currently, I am an Adjunct at College of the Sequoias in the Training Resource Center. For 37 years I've been involved with VUSD.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: Confidence that our children are getting the best opportunity to grow. Parent's access to every aspect of what happens in school—will build confidence. Parent's voices and values above the voices and values of Teacher's Union—will build confidence. Removal of divisive curriculum—will build confidence. Keeping politics and cultural reconstruction out of the classroom—will build confidence. Wise use of tax \$, Increased Safety plus transparency, and bolstering basic academics—will build confidence.

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: The Official 16-page State Board of Education document defines College and Career Readiness. I propose that we continue to raise the expectations like the recent improvement in Math graduation requirement. I would like to see a greater emphasis of real-world applications like the Personal Finance Class combined with ever increasing partnership with the local commerce leaders to evaluate how best to give students the tools to bring their Career readiness to higher level.



Juan R. Guerrero

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I am Juan Guerrero. I have lived in the school district since 1978. I am married to Stella and have raised my children and grandchildren in Visalia. I am a retired Youth Program Director and government analyst. I am the incumbent and serve as school board president.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: Learning loss is the biggest issue facing VUSD. Students experienced two years of pandemic hybrid or online distance learning. VUSD needs to address learning loss at all levels especially at the elementary level. Expanded learning opportunities must occur before and after school, winter break and summer. English language arts and math need to be the focus so that students can be at grade level. Engagement and connectiveness with students must occur.

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: In January of 2022 the school board set a goal of 75% for college and career ready. VUSD also is requiring a 3rd year of math for graduation, making VUSD graduates eligible to enter UC and State Universities. Support of VUSD's eight link learning academies and forty-two CTE pathways must continue. Link Learning affords students the opportunity to explore careers in education, workforce or the military. Support of VPIE must continued.



Catalina Blair

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As a mother of 3 VUSD students and a born-and-raised Visalian, I felt called to serve our families and strengthen our schools. We deserve leadership that understands our community's needs and will fight for our values. That's why I'm committed to improving Visalia's future—one child at a time.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: The biggest issue facing our school district is simple: focus. For too long, our administrators and educators have been distracted by poor policy from the top down and have been weighed by a pandemic that has hampered achievement. It's why I fought for families to actively participate in strengthening the education of our children and why I worked diligently to bring new leadership to Visalia Unified. Our work, however, is just beginning!

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: I believe that the formula for more college and career readiness is higher expectations coupled with support. Not only are we raising the bar in VUSD but we are providing more opportunities for Career Technical Education, providing tutoring (online and in-person) and reading intervention, and most importantly, hiring and retaining dedicated teachers who are partnered with us in this mission.



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I worked as an educator for Visalia Unified for 32 years as a drafting teacher, as an assistant principal, a high school principal at Sequoia and Redwood, and became a district administrator, closing my career with three years as superintendent. I received a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership in 2003.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: The biggest issue facing the school district is the need for the development and implementation of strong systems to address the needs of students and schools. These systems include a strong instructional model, including good first teaching; strong academic support for individual students; social and emotional support for students; clear, strong and appropriate procedures for student discipline; and relevant professional development for all staff.

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: The role of the board is to set the goal for increased numbers of college and career ready graduates, and to monitor the success of the plans undertaken by district staff. The indicators of progress that would be most important to review include numbers and percentages of students reading at grade level by fourth grade, ready to take Math I or higher at the end of the eighth grade, and completing a set of courses focused in a particular field of study in high school.



Crystal Reynolds

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My name is Crystal Reynolds. I have been a Visalia resident for 20 years and married to my husband Ray for 16 years. We have 3 children, who have all been in VUSD. I've been a dance educator throughout Tulare County for over 26 years and have been the owner and director of a dance studio in Tulare for 13 years. Previously, I worked as a Licensed Vocational Nursing Director for one of Visalia's largest Assisted Living Communities.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: The greatest issue facing our District has been the loss of local control. The inability for the District to operate as a local body should be concerning to everyone. For 2.5 years, I watched our board vote in favor of very restrictive measures such as forced masking, testing and social distancing due to fear of losing funding, liability and threats to pull teacher credentials. Some of our current board members have mentioned fears of a complete state take over if they don't comply with state guidance. It is my genuine concern, we may already be in a "state take over" if demands and restrictions such as these are tied to the funding and the District is not allowed the choice to operate independently.

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: To ensure we are doing our best in facilitating high school graduates to be college and career ready, we need to make sure we are "setting the table" for each students' unique and inherent growth potential. Through a collaboration of teachers, students, parents and counselors, we must be proactive in early assessment of areas of needed improvement and we must intervene with early interventions, resources and tools needed to facilitate student growth.



Jonelle Murphy

District 6
Instagram: instagram.com/murphy-4vUSDarea6

My name is Jonelle Murphy and I am a mother to 2 boys, both in VUSD. My experience is in management, inventory control, and was a heavy equipment operator for 6 years before deciding to be a stay at home mom after having my youngest.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: I believe VUSD's biggest issue is their lack of parent engagement. They let the state and government take over our schools during these past couple years and kicked the parents to the curb. Parent engagement on and off campus is crucial to student success. VUSD needs to build that trust back.

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: My plan to ensure more graduates are college or career ready would be to raise the standards. Give an average teenager a minimum requirement, and they will do just that; the bare minimum. That doesn't mean they are incapable. I would also like to see more "special interest" courses and college courses offered to get students excited and really thinking about what it is they want to do after high school.



Randy Villegas

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Randy Villegas is a professor of Political Science at College of the Sequoias and a Trustee for VUSD. A product of public education, he recently completed his doctorate from UCSC. Randy serves on the board of directors for several nonprofits and is honored to serve our students, families, and community.

What is the biggest issue facing the school district?: The biggest issue facing our district is increasing our academic achievement of students, and investing into programs that will keep students connected. We need to ensure that more of our students are college/career ready and that we are supporting after school programs, athletics, and Visual and Performing Arts across all our schools. Additionally we need to ensure that both students and staff have resources to address mental health, investing in psychologists, counselors, and social workers.

What is your plan to ensure more high school graduates are college- and career-ready?: My plan is to set higher expectations for our students, and provide a high amount of resources for them to meet and exceed those expectations. I want our district to lead by aligning our graduation requirements with A-G standards so every student graduates college/career ready. Additionally I want to increase dual enrollment opportunities so students are able to earn college credit and work towards obtaining an associates degree at the same time as their diploma.

Thank you TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



HEALTH CARE NOTE

The financial cost of a pandemic



By Gary K. Herbst
Chief Executive Officer
Kaweah Health

We have all experienced financial loss at the hands of COVID-19, but it may surprise you to learn that hospitals are in the same boat. Kaweah Health is among the 53 percent of U.S. hospitals who are expected to lose money this year, according to a new report prepared by consulting firm Kaufman Hall



for the American Hospital Association. We've budgeted the first operating loss in our organization's history this year—an estimated \$11.2 million. We continue to struggle with unprecedented labor costs and the high rate of inflation. In the first two months of the fiscal year, our actual losses have exceeded our projections mainly due to the costs of contract labor and extra-shift bonuses that ensure staff are available to care for patients at the bedside. Unlike other industries, hospitals cannot simply raise prices; they are fixed by contract or by the Federal and State governments. What this means to you, our business community, is that we need your support. Your support will help us continue to improve the health of our community and our economy.

There is excellent care available locally and we encourage you, at every opportunity, to consider seeking care in your own community. Here's why: healthcare organizations improve the health of our community by providing much needed services to our community—trauma care, heart care, stroke care, cancer care, neurosurgery, and general surgery, etc.—but they also drive economic health. Each year, Kaweah Health infuses nearly \$1.1 billion into our lo-

cal economy, according to a recent study by Impact Data-Source of Austin, Texas.

As the largest employer in Tulare County, our workforce—made up of everyone from nurses to therapists to people who cook and clean rooms—earns an estimated \$513.3 million and spends \$420.8 million of that right here in Tulare County, the study found. Our employees are well-paid, making an average salary of \$73,584, which is significantly higher than the average annual wage of \$43,633 in Tulare County. Our employees spend \$420.8 million a year in Tulare County on everything from housing (\$154.7 million) to transportation (\$63.9 million) to food (\$56 million) and more (\$145.8 million on insurance, healthcare, entertainment, etc.) each year, all of which help support our regional economy. As a local non-profit, public entity, we also support local business. Nearly everything we generate stays local except money we pay to national vendors and we try to use locally whenever we can.

However, nationwide and even locally, healthcare organizations are working to shore up their financial positions. Some are reducing staff—Bakersfield Heart Hospital recently laid off 114 of its more than 200 employees. Other systems are exploring whether to close services. We will continue to do everything we can afford to support the health of our community, but we will have to make some painfully difficult decisions. Our focus will remain on meeting the healthcare needs of this region and being the best healthcare system that we can be for this community. We are currently in the top five percent of hospitals in the country and an overall leader in clinical excellence and we'll do everything we can to make sure that remains the case.

Again, I encourage the residents of Tulare County to support your three local hospitals: Kaweah Health, Sierra View Medical Center, and Adventist Health Tulare. There is excellent care available locally; please choose to seek care locally. Concerned citizens can also reach out to their Federal and State representatives to let them know that your local hospitals need their support during these unprecedented times.



STOCK PHOTO

THE LAW AT WORK

Drafting an effective termination letter



By Brett T. Abbott
Gubler & Abbott LLP

While it's never enjoyable, every employer at some point has to terminate an employee. And when the time comes to let an employee go, it is important to do it the right way. Employers can sometimes get into trouble for how a termination occurred, not why. Drafting a proper termination letter can help avoid such problems.

What should be in a termination letter? Employers may wish to include the following:

- A notice that the action was a termination (as opposed to resignation, etc.);
- The date of the termination;
- The reasons for the termination—avoid being too vague or too specific;
- The dates and subject matter of prior warnings—this is especially useful when documentary evidence supports prior discipline;
- Benefits to which the employee is entitled;

■ Circumstances under which the employee had access to a second review or appeal of the termination—here is where an employer may agree to characterize the employee's departure as a layoff, resignation, or retirement;

■ The employee's last day of work and what company property must be returned by that date; and

■ The date, time, and place for an "exit interview"—at the exit interview, the employer should notify the employee that a paycheck for final wages, including accrued unused vacation time, will be provided. An exit interview is not required. However, if no interview is done, the termination letter should specify how the final wages will be provided.

A copy of the letter should be given to the employee's immediate supervisor and a copy should be placed in the employee's personnel file.

While there are no guarantees that a terminated employee will not seek legal action after a termination, a properly drafted termination letter can go a long way in preventing problems down the road.

This column is for education and information purposes only; it should not be construed as legal advice. If you have an employment law question for inclusion in a future column, contact Brett T. Abbott at Gubler & Abbott (brett@thecalifornialawyers.com). For specific employment law advice or other legal assistance, contact Gubler & Abbott (559) 625-9600, 1110 N. Chinoweth St., Visalia, CA 93291 (www.thecalifornialawyers.com).

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but for life not to escape us

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